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Modern Philology

VOLUME XIII

December 1915

NUMBER 8

SYR GAWAYN AND THE GRENE KNYȜT¹

I. THE BEHEADING GAME

Most readers of the Middle English poem *Syr Gawayn and the Grene KnyȜt* have probably felt that its action consists of two plots—the beheading game and the loyalty test. Though at the end it seems clear that the story has but one aim, to test Gawain's bravery and his loyalty, the entire difference in the form of the tests and the curious way in which the second is placed inside the first would probably lead any casual reader to assume that originally the plots were separate, and that the Gawain poet arbitrarily united them for his own purposes. In fact, scholars have analyzed the action in this way. Sir Frederick Madden in his *Sir Gawayne* remarked: "It is highly probable that the author may have mingled together several narratives for the purpose of rendering his own more attractive" (p. 305). Later Miss Thomas in her dissertation attempted to show that *GGK* was built by its author from two entirely separate stories—the Carados story (with influence of the *Perlesvaus*) for the first plot, and the Gawain-Guigambresil story for the second. Gaston Paris, though he rejects these sources, seems to analyze the story into the same two distinct parts. He says, for example: "Le *GK* mêle à

¹ In the preparation of this article I have been greatly helped by several of my friends at the University of Chicago. Professor Nitze called my attention to Professor Brown's discussion of the *Fled Bricrend*, and suggested the idea which I have tried to develop in the first section. Professor Pietsch gave me references on the pentangle. Professor Cross read the article, and offered some corrections and references. My debt to Professor Manly is more extensive and more difficult to state, because before the writing of the article we had discussed in many conversations the bulk of the matters considered in it.

l'histoire du coup donné et reçu une autre aventure";¹ and he discusses separately "l'épisode principal"² and "l'épisode de la dame."³ Finally he writes: "Il est difficile de dire si cet épisode des trois journées d'épreuve a été ajouté au premier récit, avec lequel il est ici habilement entrelacé, par le poète anglais ou par le poète français qu'il suivait." So also Professor Schofield states: "This romance is made up of two distinct parts nowhere else so connected—the beheading incident and the chastity test."⁴

Is this analysis correct? An analogous case may perhaps suggest that logical independence of the plots does not necessarily imply independence in history. Earlier critics supposed that in the *Beowulf* the fight with Grendel and that with Grendel's mother were originally independent, because logically they are independent. But scholars familiar with folk-tales have come to realize that the two actions are one plot and that they are regularly joined together in stories of a certain type; and recently Professor Panzer, by the study of some two hundred analogues of the story, has proved this to be so. Now, as in the *Beowulf*, so in *GGK*, perhaps appearances are deceptive; at any rate the evidence should be studied. If the two parts of *GGK* were originally distinct, we should expect to find the beheading story in its other occurrences connected with plots and used for purposes different from those of *GGK*. On the other hand, if we find in several cases that the beheading story is connected with an action similar to the latter part of *GGK*, we must suppose that the two parts are not separable. Further, if a study of these cases shows that they can be referred to a definite, established type of story, we may be able to understand more clearly the exact nature of *GGK* and get some idea of how it reached its present form. Thus, by making a study of all stories in which the beheading game appears, we may be able to determine two important points: the original connection or lack of connection between the two parts of *GGK*, and the original nature of the story.

Now there are six or seven stories containing a beheading game similar to that of *GGK*. Some had been pointed out by Sir Frederick

¹ *Romania*, XII, 378.

² *Histoire littéraire*, XXX, 75.

³ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴ *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, p. 217. As to the pertinence of "chastity" here, see section II of this article.

Madden, but the entire number was first given by Gaston Paris in the thirtieth volume of the *Histoire littéraire*. The list comprises: the *Fled Bricrend*, the Carados story (in the first continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval*), *Perlesvaus*, *la Mule sanz Fraïn*, *Diu Krône*, *Gawain and Humbaut*,¹ and the ballads *The Green Knight*, and *The Turke and Gowin*. The oldest of these is doubtless the *Fled Bricrend*, which is preserved in a manuscript dated about 1100 and shows evidences of much earlier origin—perhaps as early as the ninth century.² The story is as follows:³

Bricriu of the Evil Tongue invites Conchobar and the Ultonians to a feast in a great house which he has built. Before the guests reach his house, Bricriu confers separately with the three heroes, Loigaire, Conall, and Cuchulainn, inciting them to contend for the champion's portion⁴ of his house—a great cauldron full of wine, and a seven-year-old boar. As soon as the feast is started, a fight over the champion's portion arises. Conchobar intervenes and brings about a truce, but some days later the trouble breaks out again. Then Conchobar interposes and advises them to seek Curoi mac Dairi as arbiter. First Loigaire goes until he is enveloped in a heavy mist which confuses him and compels him to stop. While he and his servant are waiting for the mist to clear away, they are attacked by a giant. Loigaire is defeated and compelled to flee, leaving his horses, his arms, and his servant. Conall then passes through the same experiences. Finally Cuchulainn sets forth, encounters the magical mist, and is attacked by the giant. He defeats the giant, however, and brings back his comrades' horses, charioteers, and armor to Bricriu's house. Bricriu tries to award the champion's portion to Cuchulainn, but the others object. Then they are sent to another arbiter, but when his decision is rendered they refuse to abide by it. They are then sent to the ford of Yellow, son of Fair, for judgment. Yellow knows that the judgment rendered by the preceding umpire has not been accepted, and he does not wish to involve himself by giving a decision. So he sends them to Terror, son of Great Fear, who, the author states, "used to shift his form into what shape he pleased," and was "called wizard from the extent to which he changed his divers shapes." When they arrive at Terror's loch, he proposes the head-cutting game as a test. "I have an axe, and the man into

¹ Ed. J. Stürzinger and H. Breuer, Halle, 1914. As the book has not yet arrived in Chicago I am unable to consider this poem at present.

² Ed. George Henderson, Irish Texts Society, II. See Henderson's Introduction, p. xlv. See Zimmer, *Zs. f. d. Alt.*, XXXII, 197 and n. 2; and Nutt, *Pop. Studies in Myth.*, VIII, 30.

³ In the early part of the story I omit many details which deal with the stirring up of the strife and have no relevance here.

⁴ On the significance of the champion's portion, see Henderson's Introduction, pp. xiii-xv.

whose hands it shall be put is to cut off my head today, I to cut off his tomorrow." There are two versions as to the actions of Loigaire and Conall: according to one they refuse to submit to the test; according to the other they cut off the giant's head but will not submit themselves to the beheading. Cuchulainn, however, agrees to accept the test. He cuts off the giant's head, and next day lays his head upon a stone. Terror "draws down thrice on Cuchulainn's neck," and then awards him the sovereignty of the heroes of Erin without harming him. But Loigaire and Conall dispute the verdict, and again the Ultonians advise the three to seek Curoi. At Fort Curoi, Bláthnat, Mind's daughter and Curoi's wife, welcomes them. Curoi is not at home, but knowing that they will come, he has instructed his wife regarding their entertainment. "When bedtime was come, she told them that each was to take his night watching the fort until Curoi should return. . . . In what airt soever of the globe Curoi should happen to be, every night o'er the fort he chanted a spell, till the fort revolved as swiftly as a mill-stone." The first night Loigaire watches. A giant comes, hurls tree trunks at Loigaire, and finally seizes him in his hands and throws him out over the fort into the *fosse*. On the second night Conall fares in the same way. On the third night Cuchulainn is attacked by three groups of nine; he kills them all and piles them in a heap. Then the monster of the loch rises up and springs into the fort. Cuchulainn kills it. Finally the giant comes. Cuchulainn overcomes him and makes him promise to grant three wishes—the sovereignty over the heroes, the champion's portion, and precedence for his wife over the other ladies. Upon his re-entering the house he meets Bláthnat, and almost at once Curoi appears. Curoi adjudges the championship to Cuchulainn. Upon the return of the three warriors to Bricriu's house, however, the championship is not definitely awarded.

One day while the three heroes are absent from the court, a great giant enters Conchobar's palace. He carries a huge stock in his left hand and an axe in his right. He proposes the beheading game: "that I may cut off his head tonight, he mine tomorrow night."¹ Fat-neck accepts the challenge, but on the following day refuses to let his head be cut off. On succeeding days Loigaire and Conall fail in the same way. Finally on a night when Cuchulainn is present, the giant appears and accuses the warriors of cowardice. Cuchulainn cuts off his head, and submits to beheading on the next day. He stretches out his neck and blames the giant for not beheading him quickly. The giant lifts the axe and lets it fall on Cuchulainn's neck with the blunt side below. He awards Cuchulainn the champion's portion, and vanishes. "It was Curoi mac Dairi who in that guise had come to fulfil the promise he had given to Cuchulainn."

There the story ends.²

¹ Here the twelfth-century MS ends.

² It is obvious that in this work we have a compilation made from different versions of the story, and at times containing two versions of the same episode. So, for example, the

Professor A. C. L. Brown in his *Iwain* considers this story at considerable length. In addition to printing a summary of the *Fled Bricrend* he gives the following account from the *Dinnshenchas*:¹

Curoi mac Dairi's wife Bláthnat, daughter of Menn, king of Falga, loved Cuchulinn and urged him to come to take her from Curoi. Cuchulinn did so. At an appointed signal, he stormed the fort, slew its owner, and married Bláthnat. Together with her he secured the famous cows and cauldron belonging to Curoi.

Several more detailed versions of this story occur in early sources. One of these, which Professor Kuno Meyer dates in the tenth century, gives the story in the form of a vision seen by Curoi's poet. Another, called "The Tragic Death of Curoi Mac Dari," gives a still more detailed account.² Reference to Curoi and his strife with Cuchulainn occurs also in Welsh.³ The best version for our purposes is that given by Keating. It is as follows:

The heroes of the Red Branch are going to ravage Mana, a sea-girt isle not far from Scotland, where there is a great store of riches and a beautiful damsel, Bláthnat, daughter of the lord of that island. Curoi, hearing of the adventure, transforms himself into a false shape and joins the company. Curoi offers to take the fortress in which the maiden is, provided he is given his choice of the jewels in it. He stops the motion of an enchanted wheel that is placed in the gate of the rath, and thus lets the others in. After the winning of the castle, he claims Bláthnat as his reward, and carries her away. Later Cuchulainn meets Bláthnat, learns that she loves him, and they plan to overcome Curoi. As a signal Bláthnat pours milk into the stream which flows from the castle down to Cuchulainn's ambush. Cuchulainn storms the castle and kills Curoi. After the death of Curoi, the latter's poet, Ferchertne, goes to find Bláthnat. He comes upon her standing on the edge of a cliff. Claspings his arms about her, he plunges with her down the precipice.⁴

Professor Brown shows that Falga is a synonym for the Other World—a fact also pointed out by Henderson (p. 142). Menn is king of the Isle of Man (or Fairyland), and hence his daughter

two beheading incidents are clearly variants of the same incident. See Henderson's Introduction; Thurneysen, *Sagen aus dem alten Irland*; and Brown, *Iwain*, pp. 53, 55. Brown argues that the giant of the mist and Terror are Curoi in disguise.

¹ *Iwain*, p. 51. Also printed by O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, I, 530 and II, 482.

² Ed. K. Meyer, *Zs. f. celt. Phil.*, II, 40.

³ Skene, *The Four Ancient Books of Wales*, I, 254–55.

⁴ *History of Ireland*, trans. O'Mahoney, pp. 282–84.

Bláthnat is a *fée*. "Curoi, her husband, is an exactly parallel figure to Manannán mac Lir. He is a magician and a shape-shifter. . . . He knew beforehand of their coming (as is always the case in the Other World journey) and arranged for them a warm reception." The giant whom Cuchulainn overcomes at Curoi's fort is undoubtedly Curoi. The kind words bestowed by Bláthnat when he conquers her husband are significant. Finally Brown says: "Keeping clear of theory it is plain . . . that Cuchulinn was credited with an Other World Journey, in which he slew a giant who dwelt in a revolving castle, and married the giant's fairy wife."¹

In a later part of his work Professor Brown argues that the form in which fairy-mistress stories are preserved to us has been much changed by rationalizers

"who have modified the original relations of the supernatural actors to make them conform to ordinary human relations. All the Celtic fairy stories, with the exception of the *Echtra Condla*, show traces of having been influenced by a general tendency to represent the fairy folk as merely human beings living in a marvellous or distant land. Fairy relationships are interpreted after a strictly human pattern."²

He then outlines the primitive form of such a tale:

"The *fée* was probably always represented as supreme. She falls in love with a mortal and sends one of her maidens to invite him to her land. Several adventurers thereupon set out, but the *fée* appoints one of her creatures to guard the passage. Naturally, no one overcomes this opposing warrior but the destined hero, who is rewarded by the possession of the *fée*."

The action of Pwyll in offering his wife to Arawn, and the "ruthless way . . . in which Bláthnat marries Cuchulinn after the death of her husband" are most naturally explained on the hypothesis that "the giant was originally only a creature of the *fée*." Further, the opposing warrior originally could not be slain because, like the *fée*, he was an Other-World being. And all of them—Manannán, Arawn, Curoi—are shape-shifters. "The combat was in origin only a test

¹ It is curious to notice that, from an entirely different point of view, Professor Zimmer arrives at the conclusion that the author of the *Fled Bricrend* suppressed the account of Bláthnat and Cuchulainn's love. After outlining the story as told by Keating, he says: "Es liegt daher nahe, dass der Erzähler der Episode von dem Abenteuer der Helden bei Curois Stadt im 9. Jahrhundert [i.e., the narrator of the *Fled Bricrend*] einige kurze Sätzchen dezent unterdrückt hat" (*Sitzungsberichte der königl. preuss. Akad. der Wissensch.*, 1911, p. 205).

² *Iwain*, p. 97.

of valor. Its object was to give the hero a chance to prove that he was worthy of the love of a fée."

Of course it is impossible for me to do justice to the force of Professor Brown's presentation, since he arrives at these results through the analysis of many stories and an extensive discussion. If his reasoning is correct (and it seems to me unquestionable), we have in the tale of Curoi the beheading game in connection with a fairy-mistress story as a test which the hero must meet in order to win the fairy, and we also have the proposer of the test (Curoi) established as a shape-shifter.

Though the next three analogues cannot be dated with exactness, I shall discuss them in what is probably the chronological order: the continuation of Chrétien's *Perceval*, the *Perlesvaus*, and the *Mule sanz Fraïn*. The Carados episode in the *Perceval*¹ runs as follows:

On the day after Pentecost Kay announces to King Arthur that dinner is ready. The king refuses to eat until some strange novelty or other adventure has happened, for he has observed that custom all his life. Just then a tall knight, carrying a long sword, enters the hall. He rides on his horse up to the dais and greets the king. He demands a gift from the king, and when the latter has promised it in advance, he asks one stroke on the neck for another:

Le don est colée recevoir
Por un autre colée prendre (Mpl. MS).

The king asks him what he means, and he answers that if any knight will cut off his head at one stroke of his sword, he will return a year later and give to that knight a stroke in return. The knights are afraid to attempt the adventure, and the stranger taunts them with their cowardice:

Or puet véoir li rois Artus
Que sa cours n'est mie si rice
Comme cascuns dist et afice.

Carados then volunteers. (In the Mpl. MS the knight asks him whether he is one of the most eminent of Arthur's court. He answers, "No, but one of the most worthless.") Arthur tries to dissuade Carados from the task. But Carados pays no attention, and cuts off the stranger's head. The knight picks up his head, puts it in its place, reminds Carados of the agreement to be there a year from that day, and departs. The court is very much oppressed at the thought of Carados' danger.

A year from that day, Carados leaves his father's palace and goes joyously to Arthur's court. When all the members of the court are assembled, the strange knight enters as before and calls for Carados. Arthur asks the

¹ *Perceval le Gallois*, ed. Ch. Potvin, Vol. III, ll. 12625 ff.

stranger for mercy and offers treasure. But the knight refuses. (According to the Mpl. MS, Carados reproaches the knight for his slowness:

De .II. maux me ferez morir
Qui tant aësmés sans férir.)

The chevalier raises the sword, and prepares to strike the blow. But he strikes Carados only with the flat of the sword. He tells Carados to arise, draws him aside, and explains that he is the real father of Carados.

Sir Frederick Madden first called attention to this analogue, suggesting that it was the source of *GGK*. Miss Thomas carried out his suggestion in detail, trying to prove that this version, with some influence from the *Perlesvaus*, was the source of the first episode of *GGK*. This view was sufficiently refuted by Gaston Paris, who pointed out that the axe of *GGK* was much more probably original than the sword of *Perceval*, and that the form of the challenge—you cut off my head and I'll cut off yours—was certainly not so nearly original as in *GGK*, "a strok for an oper" (l. 287). As the view that the Carados story is a source for *GGK* is not now held, so far as I know, by anyone, I shall not discuss it further.¹ It is to be noted, however, that in the story as we have it here, there are no clearly primitive features except the beheading game itself. There is no fairy talisman, as in *GGK* and *Mule sanz Frain*; no turning castle, as in *Fled Bricrend* and *MSF*; no emphasis upon a fairy color, as in *GGK*. In this story the beheading game is used by a father as a test of the valor of his son. This purpose is unlike the purpose of the test in any other version. Consequently we have three possibilities: the beheading game was originally used as a father's test of his son's courage and has been altered in all other stories; or it was not originally connected with any one story and could be used freely; or it was isolated from its connection in some other kind of story and transferred to this magician-father story.

In the *Perlesvaus*,² the beheading story is involved with a mass of other adventures. After Gawain's sight of the Grail and failure to ask the question in the castle of King Fisherman, he rides until he comes to a castle full of people making merry. As no one offers to entertain him there, he departs,

¹ See Miss Weston's *The Legend of Sir Gawain*, p. 87; and *Cambridge History*, I, 366. Miss Weston's summary of the Perceval episode is not entirely correct. The statement "at the prayer of the queen and her ladies he forbears the blow" cannot be derived from the text given by Potvin.

² *Perceval le Gallois*, ed. Ch. Potvin, Vol. I.

riding until he comes to a poor castle. An ill-dressed knight meets him at the entrance and bids him welcome. In the hall he sees two maidens clad in mean garments. A wounded knight then enters and tells him that Lancelot is fighting a short distance away against four knights. Gawain rides forth, finds Lancelot, and, after the defeat of the assailants, returns to the castle. Gawain and Lancelot bring the three horses of their enemies and give them to the indigent lord of the castle. The knight says that these make him a rich man. Gawain and Lancelot spend the night in the castle, and depart on the morrow. The story follows Lancelot, who passes through an adventure of a perilous passage and a lady in a castle, which seems to be an adaptation of a fairy-mistress story. Then he comes to a waste city in which he finds a palace that seems inhabited. He hears knights and ladies lamenting because a certain knight has been condemned to death. Then a knight approaches him and offers the beheading game. Lancelot must cut off his head or have his own cut off. Under protest Lancelot accepts, promising to return a year from that day and put his head in the same jeopardy. He cuts off the knight's head, and departs amid the lamentation of the people (pp. 103 ff.). At the appointed time Lancelot goes toward the waste city, but on his way he meets the poor knight of the waste castle. The knight tells him that he is given respite until forty days after the achievement of the Grail. He says that he must remain poor until Lancelot returns. Finally on the proper day Lancelot goes to the waste city. He finds the ladies there lamenting that the knight who slew their knight has betrayed them, by failing to keep his promise. As soon as Lancelot appears, a knight comes bearing the axe. This knight is the brother of the one whom Lancelot slew. Lancelot prepares to die. When he hears the blow coming he bends his head and the axe misses. The knight reproves him for having moved. As the knight is aiming a second blow, two ladies appear at the palace windows, and one of them cries out to him that if he is to have her love, he must not harm Lancelot. The knight throws down his axe and asks Lancelot's forgiveness. Then the two maidens explain that they are the two whom he saw at the waste castle, and that the waste city would never have been repopled, nor should they have regained their estates, unless a knight as loyal as he had come. Other knights have cut off the heads of brothers and relatives, but they have failed to return. Lancelot sees and hears the joy of the people who are now able to come back to the city (pp. 230 ff.).

This story is certainly very far from clear or intelligible. As M. Orłowski remarks: "On s'efforce en vain de trouver un sens à ce conte."¹ Who put the enchantment upon the poor knight and the two ladies, and why it was done, are never suggested. The ending is also inconsistent: if this is a test to release somebody from

¹ In his edition of *la Damoisele à la Mule*, p. 103.

enchantment, the knight never meant to cut off Lancelot's head. Yet here he seems to mean it seriously (Lancelot is apparently saved from the first blow only by the movement of his head), and desists only at the entreaty of the damsel. In one respect this story is certainly less primitive than most other instances of the beheading game—its entire rationalization of that incident. In nearly all other cases we are dealing with a supernatural creature whose head can be cut off and put on again without harm to him. Here we have a human being who dies when his head is cut off, and the second part of the "game" is carried out by a brother.

A great deal has been made of the fact that in this version Lancelot recoils slightly at the first blow, much as Gawain does in *GGK*. Such a similarity does not seem to me evidence of close connection between the versions. A certain amount of development at the point where the stranger returns the blow to the hero is inevitable for purposes of suspense. Most of the versions have details to prolong the reader's anxiety at this point, e.g., the hero's complaint, in Carados and *GGK*, that the stranger is too slow ("Wy presch on, pou pro man, pou pretez to longe"), and the three blows in *Fled Bricrend* and *GGK*. Such a resemblance, like the remark in both *MSF* and *Fled Bricrend* that the castle turned like a mill-stone, is merely a natural development of a circumstance common to two stories. The dissimilarities between this version and all others are: that the beheading incident is here connected with a story unlike any that occurs elsewhere, and that the incident has been completely rationalized. This story may, however, be merely a bungling attempt to make something new out of a fairy-mistress story. At the end the poor knight who figures elsewhere does not appear. Instead the two beautiful damsels apparently rule the palace, and one of them commands the beheader to release Gawain. The deserted city is much like the deserted castle which we shall find later in *MSF*, and in this latter case the deserted castle may be explained as an outgrowth from a fairy-mistress story. Upon the success of the hero both become repopulated (for a definite reason in the latter case) by a throng of people who are happy over their release. It is conceivable then that the beheading game in the *Perlesvaus* was a test for the winning of a fairy mistress as it certainly is in *MSF*.

There are several respects in which the stories in *Perceval* and *Perlesvaus* join in being unlike the other analogues: both give the adventure to a hero not elsewhere connected with a beheading story; both connect the beheading game with a plot not elsewhere found in this connection;¹ and both show especially modern features—the sword instead of the axe in *Perceval*, and the complete rationalization of the beheading game in *Perlesvaus*. These facts are evidence that these two sources contain more modern and more altered versions than the other documents, and they tend to discredit the testimony of these versions when in conflict with the others.

The next version, that of the *MSF*,² may be summarized as follows:

King Arthur is holding court at Cardoil at Pentecost. As the lords and ladies are amusing themselves after dinner, they chance to look out of a window and see a maiden approaching on a mule without a bridle. The lady is brought courteously to the king. She tells him that she is sad and will never be happy until her bridle is returned to her,

Qui mauvaisement m'est toluz,
Don perdu ai tote ma joie.

If some knight will go to a certain place and get it for her, she will become his. She offers to lend such an adventurer her mule, which will lead him to a certain castle. Kex undertakes the adventure. He seeks to kiss the lady before departing, but is denied by her until he shall have brought the bridle. She seems also to promise him the castle:

Mès quant li frains sera renduz,
Lors vos iert li chastiax renduz,
Et li baisiers et l'autre chose.

Kex departs riding the mule. The maiden knows that he will not succeed. Kex enters into a great forest infested with wild animals—lions, tigers, and leopards. Kex is greatly frightened, but the animals, running up, recognize the mule and kneel before it on the ground. Passing through the forest the mule enters upon a small path and finally comes to a valley—a frightful place containing serpents, adders, and beasts which send out fire from their heads. Kex is nearly frightened out of his wits. Finally he comes out upon a plain with a fountain and a river in it. He goes on until he comes to

¹ Unless *Perlesvaus* be regarded as at bottom a fairy-mistress story.

² Editions: M. Méon, *Nouveau Recueil de Fabliaux*, 1823, I, 1; *la Mule sanz Frain*, ed. R. T. Hill, 1911; *la Damoisele à la Mule*, ed. B. Orlowski, 1911. I use the old title despite Orlowski's comment, because it is the one used in other discussions of *GGK*. Aside from the discussion of it in the *Histoire littéraire*, the poem has been summarized by Professor W. P. Ker, *Folk Lore*, 1898, p. 268 (reprinted by Henderson, *Fled Bricrend*, p. 205), and by Professor Brown, *Iwain*, p. 80.

a great river. He finds no way of crossing it except a narrow plank of iron. He is afraid to attempt the passage, and determines to return. He goes back as he had come, through the valley and the forest.

When the courtiers see Kex returning, they inform the maiden, saying that Kex is certainly bringing the bridle. She knows that he could not have got it so soon, and becomes despondent. Gauvain, smiling, asks her to cease weeping, and promises to bring her the bridle himself. Kex's failure becomes known, and the damsel, going to the king, tells him that Gauvain has promised to go. Gauvain desires to kiss her, and she permits him to do so. Gauvain mounts the mule, goes through the forest and valley, and comes to the river and the narrow iron plank. He rides the mule over this bridge, but it is certain that if the mule had not known the way it would have fallen. It goes then along a little path to a castle. The castle is strongly fortified, surrounded by a wide river, and entirely inclosed with great sharp pikes, on each of which, except one, is placed a knight's head. The castle is turning like a millstone or a whipped top. Gauvain is at a loss as to how to get in, but finally, when a door comes opposite him, jumps through it. The mule takes him through the streets of the castle, which are entirely empty of people. Finally he comes to a house, and is on the point of dismounting, when a dwarf comes along the street and greets him. "Gauvain bien veignant," he says. Gauvain asks him who he is and who his lord and lady are, but the dwarf departs without answering. After dismounting, Gauvain sees under an arch a great cave which goes deep into the earth. Up from this cave comes a shaggy *vilain*. He is taller than St. Marcel, and carries over his shoulder a great axe. The *vilain* warns Gauvain that the bridle which he seeks is well guarded, and that he will have to fight many combats for it. The *vilain* has the mule cared for, gives Gauvain a meal, and prepares a large bed for him.

Then the *vilain* proposes the head-cutting game: Gauvain to cut off the *vilain's* head that evening, and the latter to cut off Gauvain's the next morning. Gauvain agrees. The giant puts his neck upon a block, and Gauvain cuts it off at one stroke. The *vilain* then jumps up, takes his head and goes into the cave. Gauvain goes to bed. Next morning after Gauvain has arisen, the *vilain* appears whole and sound, bearing the axe. He reminds Gauvain of his agreement, and the latter replies that he has no intention of avoiding it. The *vilain* raises the axe, but he has no real desire to harm the hero, because he has been loyal and has held to his promise. Gauvain asks him how he can gain the bridle. The *vilain* answers that before midday Gauvain must fight two chained lions who could defeat ten knights. Gauvain meets the lions separately and kills them. The *vilain* then leads him to a chamber where lies a wounded knight. The latter says that Gauvain must fight him. It is a custom there that when a knight "d'autre terre" comes to seek the bridle for the damsel he has to fight this champion, and if he is killed, his head is placed on one of the pikes. The *vilain* arms them;

they mount and fight. Gauvain conquers the other knight, but in response to the latter's pleading does not kill him.

Gauvain again asks the *vilain* how he is to get the bridle. The latter says he must fight two serpents. Gauvain fights and kills them. Before he is disarmed from this fight, the dwarf, on the part of his lady, invites Gauvain to dine with his mistress and to receive the bridle. The *vilain* conducts Gauvain to the lady. She greets him courteously. She says that great harm and loss have come to her through him because he has killed her savage beasts. The lady and Gauvain sit down; the *vilain* gives them basins of gold in which they wash their hands, and then they dine. After eating, Gauvain is eager to depart. Then the lady says that the maiden who desires the bridle is her sister, and offers to Gauvain, if he will stay there, herself and her possessions. Gauvain answers that he must return to Arthur's court, and asks for the bridle. He thanks her for her offer. The lady indicates the bridle hanging on a silver nail. Having at last obtained it, he takes his leave of the lady. The castle stops turning until Gauvain has left it. After he has departed he sees the streets crowded with people who are extremely joyous. He asks the *vilain* how the streets have become thus suddenly filled. The latter explains that the people have been concealed in caves because of the ravages of the beasts which Gauvain has killed. Gauvain returns as he had come. When he arrives at the castle the damsel kisses him more than a hundred times. She offers herself to him. Gauvain tells his adventure. When Gauvain has finished his story, the girl asks leave to depart. The king, Queen Genievre, and the knights try to persuade her to remain, but she says she cannot. She rides away on her mule.

There are certainly inconsistencies in this story. Why does the maiden appeal to Arthur's court for her bridle when her sister has it? Why does the lady of the castle keep the lions and dragons to the harm of her people? Why, if the bridle is so important as the difficulties of attaining it suggest, does she give it up so readily? Perhaps these points can be explained by a little analysis. In the first place, in the various difficulties set up for the seeker of the bridle there is no effort to prevent *every* adventurer from getting it. The difficulties are so arranged that they will eliminate most seekers, but still be surmountable by *one*. The iron plank is there as a means of deterring the faint-hearted (like Kay) but of assisting the courageous. The *vilain* proposes the beheading game only as a test; he does not desire to carry out the second part, though by doing so he could prevent every seeker from attaining the bridle. He helps the knight through all the later tests, and presents them one

by one so that the knight can succeed in them. When the hero has accomplished the last feat, he is entertained by the lady and given the bridle without protest. It is clear that the lady has not arranged these tests in order to keep the bridle. It is meant that someone shall win that object. Therefore the bridle is only a pretext, not the real point of the story. Though entirely unemphasized in the poem, the lady's offer of her love to the hero who overcomes all difficulties is obviously the real purpose of the story. There are, moreover, certain details in this poem which are definitely connected with the Other-World journey plus the fairy-mistress type of story. The forest, filled with animals who recognize the mule and bow to it, is much like the forest guarded by the giant herdsman in *Iwain* and *The Lady of the Fountain*;¹ the "perilous passage,"² various feats performed by the knight at the instance of a servitor of the lady of the castle, and finally, when the knight has accomplished every requirement, the offer of the lady that he become her husband—all these are regular elements in fairy-mistress stories. It is notable also that they are preserved in a primitive form: neither the *vilain* nor the wounded knight is represented as related in any way to the lady; she is absolute mistress. There are furthermore many other primitive features in the story; the fountain before the castle, the turning castle, the heads on pikes,³ are commonplaces in old Celtic and modern folklore. If most of the story is definitely of the fairy-mistress type, is it not probable that the rest has been altered slightly? If we assume, as Professor Brown would probably do, that the maiden who comes to Arthur's court is not a sister but a servant of the lady of the castle, we do away at once with one of the chief inconsistencies of the story. Then the request of the damsel for assistance in getting her bridle is merely a device for luring the mortal hero to the fairy who loves him. The difficulties put in the way are intended to prevent any but the destined knight from reaching the fairy mistress.⁴ They do prevent Kay, but do not hinder Gawain. The

¹ Pointed out by Orłowski, p. 113.

² See Nitze, *PMLA*, XXIV, 375 and n. 5.

³ See Professor Schofield's *Studies on the Libeaus Desconus*, pp. 175 ff. The turning castle has been so definitely established as a feature of Other-World stories that I do not need to discuss it here. See Sypherd, *Studies in Chaucer's House of Fame*, pp. 138 ff.; Nitze, *Elliott Studies*, I, 26, note.

⁴ See Brown's summary of the primitive form of the fairy-mistress story, above, p. 54.

friendliness of the *vilain* is then understandable because he knows that Gawain is the right knight, and wishes to see him win the lady. The idea that the animals harmed the people would be a natural development by a late story-teller who did not understand the purpose of their presence in the story—as a test of the valor of the knight. In fact, we have in *MSF* a fairy-mistress story with very slight alterations and decidedly primitive characteristics. Hence here again, as in the *Fled Bricrend*, we have the head-cutting episode used as a test for the achievement of a fairy mistress. Furthermore, the notably primitive elements in the story give it much greater weight as evidence than the *Perceval* and *Perlesvaus* versions.

The next analogue, *Diu Krône*,¹ brings with it a rather complex problem of relationship to the poem just considered. In part it is almost identical with *MSF*: that part I pass over very briefly in the following summary.

A maiden comes riding to Arthur's court. She says she has been sent by her lady Amurfina to bring Gawein. The knight says he will go, and he rides away with the maiden. The writer explains what the adventure was. A king, dying, had left two daughters. To them he gave a bridle, saying that while they had it they should retain their possessions. The elder of the sisters, Amurfina, seized the bridle, and exiled the younger, Sgoidamur. The younger started for King Arthur's court to ask for aid. The elder, learning of this, feared the sister might get Gawein's help, and so used this device to prevent her. At length Gawein and the messenger reach the castle; there a dwarf welcomes Sir Gawein. After some time he is introduced into a beautiful room where he finds the lady sitting on a bed. After dining and conversing they go to bed. The bed is protected by a dream sword which coils itself about Gawein as he is about to draw near the lady. He has to swear to be constant to her; then the sword releases him. He drinks a potion which deprives him of knowledge of his identity; he supposes that he has always been in that country and has been married to Amurfina for thirty years. No one calls him Gawein. For fifteen days he remains in this condition. Then he happens to see a picture of himself fighting with another knight (actually the father of Amurfina), remembers his past life, recalls that he must go to free a certain king from a giant, demands his armor, and takes his departure (ll. 7647 ff.).

On the day of Pentecost, Sgoidamur reaches Arthur's court, complains of the injustice of her sister, and offers her love to anyone who will get the bridle for her. From this point the story is practically identical with

¹ *Diu Krône*, ed. G. F. H. Scholl, *Bibl. des litt. Vereins*, XXVII (1852).

MSF. When Keii returns without the bridle Launcelot offers to go, but the maid requests that Gawein be sent. Gawein departs, arrives at the enchanted castle, and, after seeing the dwarf, meets the magician Gansguoter, who is the uncle of Amurfina and Sgoidamur.¹ He takes the place of the *villain* in *MSF*. He proposes that Gawein cut off his head, on condition that on the following day Gawein will permit his own to be struck off. When it comes the magician's turn to cut off Gawein's head, he makes two feints, but does not harm the knight, because he merely desires to test Gawein's courage. After having killed lions, overcome a wounded knight, and slain dragons, Gawein hears a noise of merry-making, and is informed that the maidens of Amurfina are rejoicing at his success: they had been afraid that he would be hurt. The magician explains that Amurfina is sister of Sgoidamur, tells what relation he is to them, and expresses great delight that Gawein has won. The dwarf appears and invites Gawein to meet his lady. When the people of the castle learn that Gawein has freed them from the animals, they come from places under the earth where they had been concealed. Gawein takes Amurfina and the bridle to Arthur's court. He gives Sgoidamur the bridle, and presents her as bride to Gasozein de Dragoz (ll. 12600 ff.).

Because of the very close resemblance of part of the story in *Diu Krône* with *MSF* it has been commonly supposed that the former was derived from the latter. More recently M. Orłowski has contested this view, declaring that there are no verbal resemblances between the two, and, in particular, that *Diu Krône* offers a more logical version of the story. He points out that the idea of a sister deprived of her patrimony explains the action of the damsel in appealing to Arthur's court. He tries to establish a "Disinherited Sister" type of story, by referring to an episode in the *Iwain*,² which is in substance as follows:

On the death of the lord of Noire Espine, the elder of his daughters seizes the estates. The other says she will appeal to Arthur's court. The elder sister reaches Arthur's court first, presents her case to Gawain, and gains his assistance. When the younger arrives she is unable to get Gawain's help. Arthur gives her forty days to secure a champion. She starts out to find Iwain, falls ill, and a friend of hers continues the search. This other maiden at length comes upon Iwain and gains his consent to help the younger sister. Meanwhile Gawain has concealed himself at a short distance from court, and when he returns he is so armed as to be unrecognizable. On the

¹ There is nothing about the cave which Gawain saw in *MSF*.

² Ed. W. Foerster, 1906, ll. 4703-5106 and 5810-6459. See Orłowski's discussion, pp. 39 ff.

last of the forty days Iwain and the younger sister appear. The two champions fight until nearly exhausted; then they learn each other's names. At once they engage in a friendly rivalry, each asserting that he has been defeated. The king forces the elder sister to give the younger her share in the inheritance.

Now obviously the only resemblances here are the situation of one sister deprived of her inheritance by another, and the younger's appeal to Arthur. These resemblances are true only of *Iwain* and *Diu Krône*, for in *MSF* there is no word of unfriendliness between the two sisters, or of any disinheritance.¹ Further, the elements in common between the episode in *Iwain* and that in *Diu Krône* are too slight to establish a "Disinherited Sister" type. They have to do only with the first parts of the stories; the latter parts are totally unlike. Such similarity as there is, is much more likely to be due to borrowing by Heinrich from Chrétien than to a common source for both. Moreover, on the basis of M. Orłowski's supposition, there is no means of explaining the large number of elements in *MSF* which are connected with the fairy-mistress type. In fact, the theory of a "Disinherited Sister" type falls to the ground because of its failure to explain the chief features of this story.

In his attempt to give greater authority to *Diu Krône* than to *MSF*, M. Orłowski argues that Heinrich von dem Türlin was rather a translator than an original *trouveur*, and tries to establish for him a character for conservatism (p. 61). Hence he thinks that there is a common source for *Diu Krône*, *MSF*, and *Iwain*; and the suggestion is that this source would have told the twofold story much as it stands in *Diu Krône* (p. 63). Now such a supposition is by no means the only way of interpreting the facts, nor are the evidences which M. Orłowski gives for it sufficient. As I have shown, the evidences for the derivation of the story from a "Disinherited Sister" theme are extremely slight. As to Heinrich's conservatism, one can grant that, and still suppose that he drew from an immediate source which at this point expanded the story of *MSF* or of its immediate predecessor.

The positive arguments which may be made against the priority of Heinrich's version are as follows. If the story was originally

¹ Orłowski's table on p. 51 is incorrect in suggesting that "la sœur puînée chassée du patrimoine par l'autre" occurs in *MSF*.

like his, Païen (the author of *MSF*) must either have had as source a mutilated copy of the story, or he must have knowingly told an incomplete story, leaving the relation of the sisters obscure and illogical and not explaining the meaning of the bridle. Heinrich's version seems to be much less primitive, particularly in making the man who proposes the head-cutting a magician instead of a mere servant of the lady, and in its elaborate series of relationships—Gansguoter the husband of Arthur's mother and uncle of the two damsels, Gawein the husband of Amurfina, and Gasozein the husband of Sgoidamur. Païen's version, with but slight alteration, can be connected with a primitive type of story; Heinrich's cannot be connected with any, and has in its earlier part incidents from various sources.¹ Finally, in Heinrich's story there is no meaning in the head-cutting incident or the other feats which Gawain must perform, because if the "Disinherited Sister" theme is original, Amurfina was not trying to test knights, but actually to prevent anyone's taking away the bridle.² Other inconsistencies might be pointed out. For example, why does Amurfina give up the bridle so willingly at the end? Why does Gansguoter favor one sister rather than the other? On the other hand, it is quite easy to see how the story as told by Heinrich was developed from *MSF*. Finding in his source the suggestion that the damsel messenger and the lady of the castle were sisters, and seeing that their functions in the story were not clear, Heinrich or his predecessor prefixed the obvious story of disinheritance, perhaps deriving it from M. Orłowski's passage in the *Iwain*, or, as it is a commonplace, from no definite source. In developing it he rationalized the relations of the story and added an explanation of the significance of the bridle. It seems to me that the action of Heinrich or his predecessor is much more natural than either of the assumptions with regard to Païen made above, and the

¹ Professor Armstrong, in his edition of the *Chevalier à l'Épée*, after examining all analogues of the story of the enchanted bed, concludes that Heinrich borrowed his version directly from the *Chevalier*. See pp. 59 and 60.

² Professor Jenkins, in a review of Dr. Hill's edition of *MSF*, in *MLN*, XXVI (1911), 150, has given a bit of evidence which seems to indicate that *Diu Krône* was derived directly from *MSF*. *MSF*, l. 713, tells of a lion that fights with its tail (*coe*) and *Diu Krône* in the corresponding passage (l. 13262) reads *Zagel*. "Did the archetype have *poe* instead of *coe*? The second lion, a few lines below, strikes with his claws as we should expect." Such an error would be unlikely to date very far back: at any rate Heinrich had either *MSF* as his source or some version very close to it.

development of the story is quite a simple matter. In any case, *MSF* certainly is more primitive than *Diu Krône*, and all the evidence seems to lead us back to the standard opinion which M. Orłowski seeks to upset: namely, that in *MSF* and *Diu Krône*, we have, as in the *Fled Bricrend*, the beheading incident used as a test in the winning of a fairy mistress.

We come now to *Syr Gawayn and the Grene Knyȝt*.¹

King Arthur held feast at Camylot during Christmas. On New Year's Day the feast is prepared, but Arthur refuses to eat until some adventure has happened, for such was his custom. Scarcely is the first course served when in at the hall door enters a fearful creature, half a giant and all clad in green. His horse and all its trappings are green. He is unarmed, but carries in one hand a holly branch and in the other a great axe. He asks for the ruler of the company. Meanwhile everyone looks long at the man, eager to know what it might mean

Fat a hapel & a horse myȝt such a hwe lach,
As growe grene as þe gres & grener hit semed [ll. 234-35].

The folk deem it "phantom and fairy" (l. 240), and are afraid to answer his question. Arthur welcomes the man, saying that he is "head of this hostel." The stranger says he has come because of the great reputation of Arthur's knights for courtesy and deeds of arms. He says that the holly branch may show that he comes in peace, for if he had desired fighting he has plenty of armor at home. He asks a sport (*gomen*): if any is so brave that he "dar stifly strike a strok for an oþer" (l. 287), he will give him the axe, and bide the first blow. The other shall have respite of a year and a day. No one replies, and the Green Knight taunts Arthur's warriors with cowardice. Ashamed and angry, Arthur accepts the offer. Gawain, however, at once asks that he be allowed to relieve the king of the task. Arthur grants the request. The Green Knight asks Gawain's name, and, when he learns it, says he is glad that Gawain is the one to give the blow. He reminds Gawain that the latter must seek him a year from that day. The Green Knight kneels and uncovers his neck. Seizing the axe, Gawain strikes off his head. The knight starts up, grasps his head, which has rolled along the floor, and lifts it up. Holding his head by the hair, he steps into his stirrups and mounts. The head lifts up its eyelids and speaks, reminding Gawain of his promise, and instructing him to seek out the Green Chapel a year from that time. He then rides out of the hall. King Arthur, troubled though he is, tries to reassure the queen, and the court again sits to the feast.

The morning after All Hallows Gawain prepares to seek the Green Knight. He arms himself properly, takes his shield with the pentangle

¹ Ed. Sir F. Madden in *Syr Gawayne* (Bannatyne Club), 1839; R. Morris, E.E.T.S., IV, 1864.

painted on it, and rides away on his steed Gryngolet. All that see him sigh in their hearts and say it is a shame that he should die at the hands of "an aluisch mon." He rides through England into North Wales and apparently from thence into Wirral. He asks the people that he meets if they can tell him about a Green Knight, but gets no information. At every ford he passes over he finds a foe. He fights with serpents, wolves, wild men, bulls, bears, boars, and giants. The winter and snow, however, are worse than his fighting. Thus he rides until Christmas. He prays to Christ and Mary for some lodging where he may hear mass. Almost immediately he comes upon a castle, "with a pyked palays, pyned full pik" (l. 769).¹ The drawbridge is up, but when he calls a porter answers and bids him welcome. The bridge is let down, the gate is opened, and Gawain is brought courteously into the castle. The lord of the castle welcomes him, leads him to a chamber, and orders a servant to be sent to him. Gawain takes off his armor, and puts on the rich robes which are brought to him. He has dinner in the hall, and while there tells his host who he is. After dinner they go to chapel, and there Gawain meets the lord's wife, who seems to him more beautiful than Guinevere. With her is an old lady. After dinner they have refreshments and enjoy themselves with sports. Next day at the meal Gawain sits with the lady, the lord of the castle sitting with the "auncian wyf."

For three days the company remains together, and then some of the guests depart. Gawain says that he also must go, and when asked by the knight he explains the purpose of his journey. The knight smiles, says that the Green Chapel is not two miles thence, and so induces Gawain to stay with him until the appointed day. Then the lord of the castle proposes that next day Gawain stay in bed until meal time, and meanwhile he himself will go hunting. Further, whatever each wins he shall exchange with the other. Gawain agrees to this arrangement. In the morning the lord arises early and goes off to hunt. While he is thus engaged Gawain sleeps. While Gawain is still in bed, the lady enters his room, comes to the bed, and sits on the bedside. Gawain pretends to be asleep, but as she continues to stay there he decides to speak to her. The lady makes love to Gawain, but he only replies to her in a respectful and courteous fashion. Finally she kisses him and leaves him alone. Meanwhile the knight has killed many deer, which his men "break" and bring back to the castle. When the host has returned he gives the deer to Gawain, and receives from Gawain a kiss. When he asks where his guest won this weal, Gawain refuses to tell because that was not in the agreement. They renew their agreement for the next day. The knight hunts and kills a boar; the lady visits Gawain again and kisses him; Gawain resists her temptations; and in the evening the two men exchange their winnings, renewing their covenant for the following day. On this third morning, the knight kills a fox, and the lady visits Gawain as

¹ Can this line be a reminiscence of the pikes with human heads placed on them? See above, pp. 60 and 62, and Professor Schofield's article.

before. Again Gawain resists her temptation, but finally accepts from her her green girdle, which she says will protect him from being wounded or slain. Thinking of the danger he is soon to be in, Gawain naturally accepts the "lace" and promises to conceal it. When the host returns he gives Gawain the fox skin, and receives from him three kisses. Gawain asks for a man to show him the way to the Green Chapel, and the knight assigns one to him.

On New Year's morning Gawain arms himself, places the "lace" twice about his loins in hope of saving himself, and rides away on Gryngolet under guidance of his man. The servant tries to dissuade Gawain from going to the Green Chapel, because the man who dwells there is the worst upon earth. Gawain insists upon going forward. Then the man tells him to ride down a certain path till he comes to the bottom of a valley; there on his left on a "launde" he will see the chapel. He bids Gawain farewell and leaves him. Gawain pushes his way along the shore of a brook through the woods and comes into a valley. Looking about, he sees a wilderness, no sign of a habitation, but high steep cliffs on both sides, and rough "knokled knarrez." He sees no chapel, but soon notices in a clearing a flat-topped (*balȝ*) hill near the ford of the stream. He goes to the hill, fastens his horse to a tree, and walks about the hill. It has a hole in the end and on each side, and is hollow within, "nobot an olde caue." Gawain wonders whether this could be the Green Chapel. Feeling its uncanniness, he says: "He[re] myȝt aboute myd-nyȝt, [þ]e dele his matynnes telle," and later "Hit is þe corsdest kyrk, þat euer I com inne." Then he hears a noise beyond the brook as of someone grinding a scythe on a grindstone. He calls out, and the man in green, carrying his axe, comes out of a hole in the cliff beyond the stream, walks to the brook, hops over on his axe, and greets Gawain. The hero bends his neck for the blow. The Green Knight lifts the axe, but as he brings it down, Gawain shrinks aside. The knight reproves him; Gawain tells him to hurry up. The knight aims at him, but withholds his hand. Gawain says he thinks the man is afraid of himself. Then the knight strikes Gawain a blow which wounds him slightly. Gawain refuses to abide another, saying that he has fulfilled his compact. Then the knight reveals himself as the host of the castle, and explains that he menaced Gawain three times in accordance with the three agreements they made. The third time he wounded him slightly because he had concealed the "lace" and was in this respect disloyal. He knew all about the wooing of his wife because he sent her to test Gawain. Angered, Gawain takes off the girdle and returns it to the knight. The latter gives the girdle back to Gawain as a remembrance of his adventure. Gawain says he will wear it in remembrance of his fault. The Green Knight says that his name is Bernlak de Hautdesert. The ancient lady was Morgne la Faye, and she sent him to Arthur's court to test his knights, and cause Guinevere to grieve and die of fright at the sight of the ghostly speaker with his head in his hand. Gawain refuses an invitation to return to the castle, and rides back to Arthur's court wearing the belt as a baldric. He shows

the "lace" to the king, and tells him the story. The lords and ladies of the Round Table agree to wear a baldric of bright green "for sake of þat segge."

Now it is obvious enough that this is a much better constructed tale than *MSF* or the episodes in *Perlesvaus* and *Diu Krône*. Yet even here there is one element of feebleness and inconsistency—the explanation of the test given by the Green Knight at the end. He says that Morgain sent him

For to assay þe surquidre, ȝif hit soth were,
 Ðat rennes of þe grete renoun of þe Rounde Table:
 Ho wayued¹ me þis wonder, your wytteȝ to reue,
 For to haf greued Gaynour, & gart hir to dyȝe,
 With g[l]opnyng of þat ilke gomen, þat gostlych spekere,
 With his hede in his honde, bifore þe hyȝe table [ll. 2457 ff.].

The enmity of Morgain to Arthur and his court is well known,² and it seems to have suggested this explanation. By means of the horn and mantle tests she did bring humiliation upon Guinevere and Arthur.³ But this test is quite a different matter; by it Gawain gains only greater glory, and Arthur's court a better reputation. Being an enchantress, she of course knew what would be the outcome of her scheme. Why should she then plan a test which Gawain could meet? Further, if she was inspired by enmity, why was she so just in carrying out the tests? She tests him with perfect justice: had he proved disloyal to the lord of the castle, he would have been killed. What was her motive? What could she gain by this test? The explanation is one that seems to be sensible superficially but is inherently unreasonable. It was almost certainly added by some late redactor familiar with Morgain's horn and mantle tests.⁴

Before attempting to decide what the real purpose of the beheading game in *GGK* was, I wish to point out first two distinctively primitive features of the story. The most striking of these is the

¹ For "wayued," instead of "wayned," see Skeat, *Trans. Phil. Soc.*, 1885–87, pp. 365, 366.

² Cf. Miss Paton, *Fairy Mythology*, particularly chap. ii, pp. 13 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, 105 ff. This is not entirely clear, because in most extant stories in which Morgain is mentioned with the horn, the horn was taken to King Mark's court. Miss Paton, however, argues that in an early form in which Arthur tried the horn, Morgain was the sender.

⁴ Note that the poem itself is not consistent on the point. In ll. 2361 ff. the Green Knight states that *he* caused his wife to test Gawain: "I wroȝt hit myseluen | I sende hir to asay þe."

insistence upon the color green. The author could scarcely have emphasized the color more than he did. In the initial description of the knight as he enters the hall we are told in ll. 150, 151, 157, 161, 167, 170, 172, 175, 179, 189, 192, 216, 220, and 235 that his clothes, his horse, his armor, and his axe were green. It is clear that we are meant to understand that even his complexion was green—cf. ll. 149–50, “He ferde as freke were fade, | & ouer-al enker grene”; l. 151, “Ande al grayped in grene pis gome & his wedes”; l. 305 “[he] Bende his bresed broȝeȝ, blycande grene”; and ll. 234 and 235, quoted above.¹ The only attempt to explain this emphasis upon green has been made by Miss Thomas. She supposes that the poet applied this color to the strange knight by analogy with red knights and various other colored knights (pp. 39 ff.). Yet she knows in a general way that green is a fairy color. “Green is undoubtedly a more unnatural colour even than blood-red; and is moreover extended to the knight’s own person—but it is a fairy colour and apt for wonders—found also as the hue of hair in many kinds of myths and legends and in no wise so amazing as would have been, for instance, blue or purple” (p. 43). Now anyone who has read the poem must realize at once that this explanation is entirely unsatisfactory; there is too much emphasis on the green knight, the green horse, the green chapel, the green “lace.” Of course the green horse is impossible from Miss Thomas’ point of view. The real explanation is that green is a color worn by Other-World beings.² Green and red are the two special colors that distinguish them. In *Cuchulinn’s Sick Bed*, Cuchulinn meets two women—one in green and one in a fivefold crimson cloak. They are Other-World people. Later he sees the one in green again, and is induced by her to visit the Other World.³ In the *Conception of Mongan* an Other-World knight appears in a green cloak.⁴ In the story of Ciaban, voyagers see “a horseman on a dark green steed with a golden bridle, riding over the waves.” It is Manannán, king of the Underworld, whom Rhys compares with

¹ Note also ll. 2227–28:

& þe gome in þe grene gered as fyrst
Boþe þe lyre & þe leggeȝ, lokkeȝ, & berde.

² See Professor Cross’s note in *Mod. Phil.*, XII, 595, n. 3.

³ *Voyage of Bran*, I, 153.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

Curoi.¹ Green is a fairy color in the ballads; in *Thomas Rhymer*, it is said:

The meist of them [ghosts] was clad in green
To shew that death they had been in.²

Reginald Scot says that fairies were clothed in green; Bourne says that fairies are always clad in green; and in a story told by William of Newburgh we read of the finding of two fairy children in Suffolk—"the whole surface of their skin was tinged of a green color."³ In modern Celtic folklore green is frequently associated with Other-World creatures. In one story, for example, Guinevere (who was originally an Other-World being) rides on a green horse.⁴ Another story, told by the Welsh gypsies, deals with "the Green Man of No Man's Land," who is a sort of magician.⁵ Wentz says that green is worn by nearly all the fairy folk of Britain and Ireland.⁶ Examples are given by Rhÿs and Lady Wilde, and could be multiplied indefinitely.⁷ It seems hardly worth while to give further

¹ O'Grady, *Silva Gadelica*, II, 198; Brown, *Iwain*, p. 96.

² Cf. Rudiger, *Zaubern u. Aberglauben in eng.-schot. Volksballaden*, p. 42.

³ These references are from Keightley's *Fairy Mythology*, pp. 281, 290, 297.

⁴ W. Y. Evans Wentz, *The Fairy Faith*, p. 314.

⁵ F. H. Groome, *Gypsy Folk Tales*, p. 254. This story is probably a modern descendant of *GGK*. Jack, a young miller, plays with a stranger and loses; the latter tells the youth that his name is the Green Man of No Man's Land, and that Jack must find his castle in a year and a day or be beheaded. When the time to go to the castle draws near, Jack starts out to search for it. He comes upon an old woman who aids him by summoning a quarter of all the men in the world and asking them if they know the Green Man. As they do not know him she summons the birds and asks them. When they are unable to answer, she sends Jack to her elder sister. The latter calls together half the world but cannot learn who the Green Man is. She sends Jack to her eldest sister. The third sister calls all the people in the world, and then all the birds. At last the Eagle says he has just come from the Green Man. Having been instructed specifically, Jack goes to a certain pool and steals the feathers of a white bird. The bird (the Green Man's daughter) cries out, but Jack refuses to give her the feathers until she agrees to carry him to the Green Man's castle. The Green Man sets Jack impossible tasks, which the daughter performs. Finally Jack marries the daughter.

The bare skeleton of this is much like *GGK*: within a year and a day the hero must reach the Green Man's castle; there he undergoes tests and finally wins a bride. Most of the details of the old story have been replaced, however, by more common folklore motifs: e.g., the inquiries of the birds (cf. Dasent's *Three Princesses of Whiteland*), the Swan Maiden, and the helpful maiden (cf. Dasent's *Master Maid*), whose function is much like that of the Turk in *The Turke and Gowin*. The most significant fact about this variant is that it is a Welsh story, and hence probably derived from Celtic sources.

⁶ Wentz, *op. cit.*, p. 312.

⁷ For other examples of green associated with Other-World beings, see *The Courtship of Etain*, in Leahy, *Heroic Romances*, I, 12; *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, Ir. Texte, Extra Band, p. 28; *Aideda Muirchertaig*, Rev. Celt., XXIII, 397; *Echtra mac Echdach Muigmedon*, Eriu, IV, 105; *Agallamh na Senorach*, *Silva Gadelica*, II, 120, 187, 196, 202, 220, etc. I owe these references to Miss Elizabeth Willson of the University of Chicago. On fairies dressed in green, cf. Campbell, *Tales of the West Highlands*, IV, 313.

details: from the examples given above, among which, it will be noticed, are instances of green as color of clothing, complexion, and horses, it is certain that the use of green here indicates that the knight is an Other-World creature. Further it is to be observed that, like Curoi, Manannán, and other guardians of *fées*, he is a shape-shifter, for as lord of the castle he appears in so different a form that Gawain does not recognize him.

Another primitive feature is the description of the Green Chapel.

Sone a lyttel on a launde, a lawe as hit we[re]; (2171)

A balȝ berȝ, bi a bonke, þe brymme by-syde,

bi a forȝ of a flode, þat ferked þare;

þen[n]e he boȝeȝ to þe berȝe, aboute hit he walkeȝ, (2178)

D[e]batande with hym-self, quat hit be myȝt.

Hit hade a hole on þe ende, & on ayȝer syde,

& ouer-grown with gresse in glodes ay where,

& al watȝ holȝ in-with, nobot an olde caue,

Or a creuisse of an olde cragge, he coupe hit noȝt deme.

This is a surprising place for an appointment, and Gawain does not know what to make of it. It is not a romantic convention; the poet himself seems to be rather surprised by it. But it is found in primitive stories and in modern folk-tales; it is in fact a fairy mound.

"In tales dating from the eighth century at the very latest, tales the incidents, personages, and spirit of which animate Irish legend for the thousand years that follow, and still form one of the staples of Irish peasant belief, we find a tribe of superhuman beings whose abiding dwelling-place is the fairy mound, the hollow hill. . . . They are the Tuatha De Danann of the annals. . . . Manannán and Fann and Lug, the father of Cuchulinn, are of this race. They are the "fairies" of the modern Irish peasant, who calls them by the same name as did the story-teller of Connla a thousand years ago: (*aes*) *side*, the folk of the mound."¹

One of the mounds supposed to have been inhabited by the *side* is described as a hill over three hundred feet in diameter and seventy feet high. Its top is a platform one hundred and twenty feet across. It is entered by a square doorway which leads to a stone passage more

¹ *Voyage of Bran*, I, 174-75. See the references in the index of Wentz's *Fairy Faith*. See also Zimmer, *Zs. f. d. Alt.*, XXXIII, 262; Borlase, *The Dolmens of Ireland*, pp. 853-54; MacCulloch, *The Religion of the Ancient Celts*, pp. 63 ff.; W. Johnson, *Folk Memory*, pp. 150 ff.

than sixty feet long and finally a domed interior twenty feet high.¹ The general character of this is obviously similar to that of the *berȝ* described in *GGK*. The description of the Green Chapel, therefore, is a primitive element, part of the original tale.²

Now both of these features—the emphasis on green, and the description of the Green Chapel—point to a story involving Other-World beings, in the course of which the hero is tested by a shape-shifter. If the purpose of the test is not a desire on the part of Morgain la Faye to humiliate Guinevere, what is it? The fact that in the *Fled Bricrend* and *MSF* the beheading game is used as a test for the winning of a fairy mistress suggests that such may be its purpose here. Let us test the theory. In the first place, an Other-World being lures Gawain from Arthur's court through a long and difficult journey to a strange castle. There a lady offers herself to him and pretends to love him. This is of course the fairy-mistress type. Further, the proposer of the test is a shape-shifter and the husband of the lady—like Curoi and Manannán. These two great resemblances seem to me enough to establish a probability that *GGK* is a fairy-mistress story. But there are two features which are not part of this type: first, the lady acts as she does merely to *test* Gawain, not

¹ New Grange. See Squire, *Mythology of British Isles*, pp. 135 ff.; Rolleston, *Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race*, p. 69; *Trans. RIA*, XXX, 1-94.

² It is probable that the holly bough which the Green Knight carried was in the original story; cf. ll. 203 ff. (especially 206-7). The Green Knight had no helmet or hauberk,

Bot in his on honde he hade a holyn bobbe
Pat is gratest in grene, when greueȝ ar bare.

He says:

ȝe may be seker bi þis braunch þat I bere here
Pat I passe as in pes, & no plyȝt seche [ll. 265-66].

It is clear that the greenness of the branch is supposed to be connected with the color of the knight. Mr. A. B. Cook in his article on "The European Sky-God" (*Folk Lore*, XVII, 338 ff.) argues that the Green Knight was originally a tree-god and his holly branch a sort of emblem. He shows that the mining population of Dean swear by a stick of holly, and discusses examples of heroes who carry boughs (especially from Wolfram's *Parzival*). Whether one accept all his theory or not, one must conclude, I think, that there is some meaning in the holly stick. The holly is said to be dear to the fairies, and a story is told of a man who brought their wrath down upon him because he cleaned a chimney with a branch of holly (*Enc. Brit.*, X, 134). In Campbell's *Tales of the West Highlands*, I, 306, a character who is a sort of magician uses a holly branch to overcome a number of people. (The story is far from clear or coherent.) Dean Stanley is quoted as saying that the heathen hung holly in their houses that the fairies might find shelter under it (*Notes and Queries*, 4th Series, X, 492).

Probably some features of the description of the castle are also original. See above, p. 68, note. The shining white appearance of the castle ("hit schemered & schon," l. 772, and had "chalk whyt chymnees" upon roofs "þat blenked ful quyte," ll. 798-99) is characteristic of Other-World castles. Cf. Brown, *Romanic Review*, III, 158.

from real love; secondly, the hero submits to the head-cutting *after*, not *before*, the lady offers him her love. To understand these exceptional features we must study certain other facts of the *GGK*. In the first place, it is to be noted that if the Green Chapel is a fairy mound, Gawain never entered it, and hence never reached the Other World. What then is the castle in which he stayed from Christmas to New Year's? Now Professor Brown has shown that "in an earlier and more complete form of the type of story which they [the *Erec* and *Iwain*] represent the hero must have been entertained by a hospitable host, who in the morning led him to the adventure of the Other World."¹ He thinks that this hospitable host must originally have been a different appearance of the Other-World being, the "shape-shifter commissioned by the *fée* to guide the hero to her land." All this coincides curiously with the story of the castle in *GGK*: Gawain is entertained by a hospitable host, who *is* the shape-shifter, and he is guided by a servant of the host to the entrance of the mound. It seems to me that what has happened here is obvious. The story originally was much like that reconstructed by Professor Brown for the *Gilla Decair*. A *fée* loved Gawain, and sent an emissary to lure him to her. He traveled for a long time until he came to a hospitable castle where he was entertained until the appointed day by a shape-shifter, the same who had enticed him from court; then he was conveyed to the entrance to the Other World. There he had to submit to the beheading test; when he succeeded in that he was admitted to the Other World, and led to the fairy. Probably he stayed with her some time, and then after having been given a magic talisman—the green lace—he was allowed to return to his own land. Now at some time, a story-teller conceived the idea of making this story a poetic explanation of the founding of an order, probably because the green lace reminded him of the badge of that order. Wishing to associate with the order the idea of loyalty, he altered the nature of the material slightly by having Gawain resist the love of the lady, and he transferred the incident of Gawain and the lady to the hospitable castle, so as to bring the beheading test after it and make the test an evidence of Gawain's loyalty.

¹ *Iwain*, p. 138.

Probably the foregoing seems very violent and arbitrary handling of material, but I would remind the reader that the only two analogues of *GGK* that show primitive features are fairy-mistress stories, that in *GGK* we have an Other-World creature luring the hero to a distant journey and finally bringing him to a lady who offers him her love, and that as in other fairy-mistress stories the emissary of the *fée* is a shape-shifter. Surely such facts deserve attention. Furthermore, part of my reasoning can be confirmed by the evidence of documents later than *GGK*. In the *Percy Folio Manuscript*¹ occurs a ballad called *The Grene Knight*, which, though well known, has never been considered in discussions of *GGK*. It presents some interesting variations from the older romance.

Arthur's knights gather at court on Christmas Day and hold feast. Leaving Arthur, the poet tells us about Sir Bredbeddle, a knight of the west country.² He has a beautiful wife:

because Sir Gawaine was stiffe in stowre
shee loued him priuilye paramour,
& shee neuer him see.

Her mother, who is a witch, named Agostes, transposes the shape of Sir Bredbeddle and sends him to King Arthur's court.

all was for her daughters sake,
that which she soe sadlye spake
to her sonne-in-law the Knight
because Sir Gawaine was bold and hardye,
& therto full of curstesye
to bring him into her sight.

¹ Ed. Hales and Furnivall, II, 56 ff.

² A knight called Sir Bredbeddle is an important figure in the ballad *King Arthur and King Cornwall* (*PFM*, I, 61; Sargent and Kittredge, *Ballads*, p. 50; etc.). Arthur, informed by his queen that there is a king somewhere who has a round table worth three of his own, sets forth with four knights to find this king. He comes to the king's palace, is received there, and he and his knights make certain boasts of what they will accomplish. Sir Bredbeddle (not named until stanza 40) assists Arthur in carrying these out, and overcomes a certain "lodly feend." In stanzas 53, 55, 59, 68, and 74 he is called "the Greene Knight." His function throughout the story is much like that of the Turk in his assistance of Gawain, in the *Turke and Gowin*, more remotely like that of the villain in *MSF*. He performs magic deeds. (His power is explained as due to the possession of a book written by our Lord.) The king tells Arthur that he has been a lover of Guinevere's and that he has a marvelously beautiful daughter (stanzas 24-25). The king is a conjuror (stanzas 66, 67). Altogether it seems likely that the original of this curious poem was a fairy-mistress story representing various adventures through which the hero (here King Arthur) passed to win a fairy (here King Cornwall's daughter). Sir Bredbeddle was probably not originally one of Arthur's knights (note that he is not mentioned when Arthur's other companions are named early in the ballad), but an attendant upon the *fée*, a green knight who assisted the hero in the tests.

The knight says he is going to prove Gawain's three points. His horse, armor, and weapons are all green. He reaches Arthur's court on Christmas Day, and proposes the beheading game:

I shall lay my head downe
strike itt of if he can
with a stroke to garr itt bleed,
for this day 12 monthe another at his.

He promises to direct the knight to the Green Chapel. Sir Kay boasts that he will do it. Gawain offers and is permitted by the king to try the game. After dining, the Green Knight permits Gawain to strike off his head, picks it up, jumps into his saddle, and reminds Gawain to seek the Green Chapel a year hence. Arthur and Guinevere lament Gawain's plight. The Green Knight arrives home; he knows that his wife loves Gawain.

The court is very sad when Gawain has to depart. He rides through a country inhabited by wolves and wild beasts. Arriving at length at a castle, he is entertained by a knight who is the Green Knight but whom he does not recognize. They agree to exchange their winnings on a certain day. The Green Knight goes hunting. The old witch brings her daughter to Gawain's bed. The lady kisses him thrice, but Gawain refuses to be disloyal to the Green Knight. She gives him a white lace to protect him from any harm in war. When the Green Knight returns, Gawain kisses him three times, but keeps the white lace concealed. Gawain goes to the Green Chapel, submits to the blow, and is but slightly cut. The knight accuses him of flinching, but Gawain says he gave but one blow and will receive but one. The Green Knight says Gawain has lost his three points because he was not loyal in concealing the lace. The knight says, however, that if Gawain will take him to Arthur's court he will be satisfied. They go to court. That is the reason why Knights of the Bath wear a white lace.

The only discussion of this poem which I know of is that by Hales in the edition of the *Percy Folio Manuscript*. He suggests that it is a modernization of the old romance, written at a time when people could no longer read the archaic language of *GGK*. Such an explanation, however, cannot account for the marked differences in incident and motive. It can hardly be a chance that in most instances in which the *Green Knight* differs from *GGK* it is more primitive. Further, on such a hypothesis it would be difficult to account for such a change in structure as the shift from the account of the Christmas celebration at court to Sir Bredbeddle, his wife and mother-in-law. The only reasonable explanation for these differences is that the *Green Knight* goes back to some form of *GGK* anterior to

that in which we now have the poem.¹ Let us see now what bearing the *Green Knight* has on our study. In the first place, we hear in it nothing of Morgain la Faye, whose position in *GGK* is, as I have already pointed out, anomalous and almost certainly not original. Secondly, the lady loves Gawain though she has never seen him, a common feature in Celtic as well as general mediaeval romance,² and the beheading game is a device for enticing him to her. The husband has no other function than to carry out the wishes of his wife. These are all features which I have postulated above as underlying the story of *GGK*. They agree too well with the primitive fairy-mistress story to be the invention of a late redactor, and they are hence proofs that originally *GGK* was a fairy-mistress story.

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[*To be concluded*]

¹ For discussion of the exact relationship, see the end of section II, in the continuation of this paper.

² *Hist. litt.*, XXX, 34. See references in Cross's article, *Mod. Phil.*, XII, 612, n. 3.